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Devi Dja

THE 12th ANNUAL NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL

The first "Peace" festival, held in Cleveland from May 22, through 26th, was most beautiful and colorful. Over a thousand performers participated; they came from 25 states, Canada and Hawaii. The festival, sponsored by the Cleveland Sesquicentennial Commission and Western Reserve University, was held in the Music Hall of the Public Auditorium.

Amos Kubik, the town crier from Provincetown, Mass., ringing a bell and shouting "Hear ye, hear ye!" opened the folk festival and introduced Sarah Gertrude Knott, originator and leader of the festivals. The Mayor of Cleveland welcomed the guests. The Kiowa Indians, probably the most gaily feathered Indians in the United States, as in the previous 12 years, opened the program. The colored feathers and their unique arrangement is a picture out of this world. They had intricate steps and beautiful patterns. The Eagle Dance was realistic, and the Fast War Dance was intriguing.

Another Indian tribe, the Onodago branch of the Iroquis tribe from New York, appeared on Saturday and Sunday of the festival. Their dances were extremely short, hardly a half-minute; and, in contrast to the Kiowas, their steps seemed all to be in the style of jitter-bugging. One wonders who copied from whom? It was interesting nevertheless.

The Hawaiians were on every afternoon and evening performance of the entire festival. They were all pure blooded and had such names as Lokalia, Makalei, Malulani, Iolani, etc. Their entire performance was truly enchanting. It opened with the blowing of a conch shell that summoned the people to a gathering. An aged Hawaiian followed with a chant and beat an Ipu drum. Iolani Luahine entered on a stately chant and played on a Pahu drum. Then to the accompaniment of the Pahu drums and to chanting, descriptive hulas were performed. Their dancing is truly enchanting and it actually transplanted Hawaii into Cleveland.

After the Hawaiians, each day, the program changed. The following descriptions are not of any one particular day in sequence, but of the entire festival.

The most polished and most perfect group of all the American Square Dance groups, was the Pioneer Promenaders, from the University of Denver, Colo. Their dancing was absolute ballet and something to behold, but that very fact worried many folk dance leaders; it looked less like folk dancing than stage concert work. Folk dancing, as it is understood, is that in which all people, or a type of people, can easily join in. But one needs ballet training to be able to do the Western dances of Colorado. Many of the traditional dances were elaborated to such an extent that one did not know where tradition ended and choreography began. One of their square dances had a figure taken from the Polish Mazurs which they saw performed in previous years by a Chicago Polish group. Perhaps they are pioneering in fusing the dances of all nations that make up United States, in that case, they are truly pioneering, for eventually, the American folk dance will contain the best of all the immigrant nationalities and will create a new lore of a new America, the Nation of Nations. But if they are supposed doing the dances of the pioneers of the old West, then they lost the road. However, no one can deny the fact that theirs was the most beautiful and artistic square dancing anyone has ever had the pleasure to watch; it makes one wish he could dance with such perfection.

The uniquely original square dancers came from Asheville, N. C., with Bascom Lunsford and Richard Queen as

leaders. A large group of them came down and did jigging continual throughout. It required plenty of energy, and the group danced with vigor and abandon.

Texans from Austin came in family groups, grandparents and grand-children. They did some beautiful square dancing, unusual and colorful figures seldom seen elsewhere, but, none would prove too difficult for those who have never square danced.

The Henry Ford group from Dearborn, Mich., was a bit too formal. Their instruments and music were as fine as those they present on the radio, but the participants did not dance with joy. They dance as any aged millionaires who are "afraid to let their hair down". Even the caller, formally attired, called the squares stiffly and with a grave air.

The Cecil Sharp Club from Cleveland filled the stage. There must have been 200 of them, crammed with squares galore. It was a mass spectacle, a bit confusing; I wondered if they could keep their squares straight. They had one set that was composed of people well over seventy, and they were good.

There were other square dance groups, ballad singers, fiddlers, mine singers, and other remnants who still carry on types of lore that border on the verge of oblivion.

England was represented by the School of Organic Education from Fairhope, Ala., which has a tradition of English folk dances going back 38 years when it was introduced by a student of Cecil Sharp, exponent and compiler of the English dance. They did Sword, Morris and Country dances. They are still unbeatable in the English dancing.

There were two Lithuanian groups (on different days), one from Boston, Mass., and one from Chicago. The Boston group was under the direction of Mrs. Ivaška (who a month earlier gave birth to a son, Vytautas, but managed to train a group mighty well); the other was under the direction of V. F. Beliajus. Mikita (The Stick dance), performed by both groups and Blezdingėlė (The Swallow), danced by the Chicago group, were the two numbers especially well received.

Cleveland Poles united (for the first time, I've been told) to represent Poland with song and dance. Yet, there was but one boy in the dance group; otherwise some of the girls dressed as boys. They danced the Mazur with all repeats by each "boy" partner over and over, and that made the Mazur very monotonous and long. Such repetitions, we feel, should be avoided at folk festivals. The Chicago Poles from Northwestern University Settlement House fared very well and were received excellently. They did four short and snappy dances and all repeats deleted. When the Poles were through, they were a pretty exhausted group. Since the same people did the four dances without stop. That takes vim, vigor and vitality.

The Ukrainians "won the cake". Their dancing was the outstanding thing of the entire festival, excepting, for the moment, the primitive forms, Indian and Hawaiian. They were the only group that received spontaneous applause continually. There were three Ukrainian groups: one from Cleveland, one from Toronto, Canada, and a third from Windsor, Canada. Canada may well be proud with her contribution. The Toronto did Hutzul dance (Hucul Sub-Carpatho-Ruthenian) while the other two groups did dances from "Mother-Ukraine". They were the only group who would never tire the audience no matter how long they perform. Excellent! Mrs. John T. McCay from Vancouver and Mrs. E. R. Sugaraman, both representing Canada as Folk Festival delegates, were mighty proud of their fellow countrymen. Three cheers also to Mary Popovich and Dorothy Romanovich of the Cleveland Ukrainian group.